

# 40 WEEKS EARL BLUMENAUER #13 A New National Agriculture Policy 40 IDEAS

## An Overview of Oregon Agriculture

Agriculture has always been one of Oregon's rich



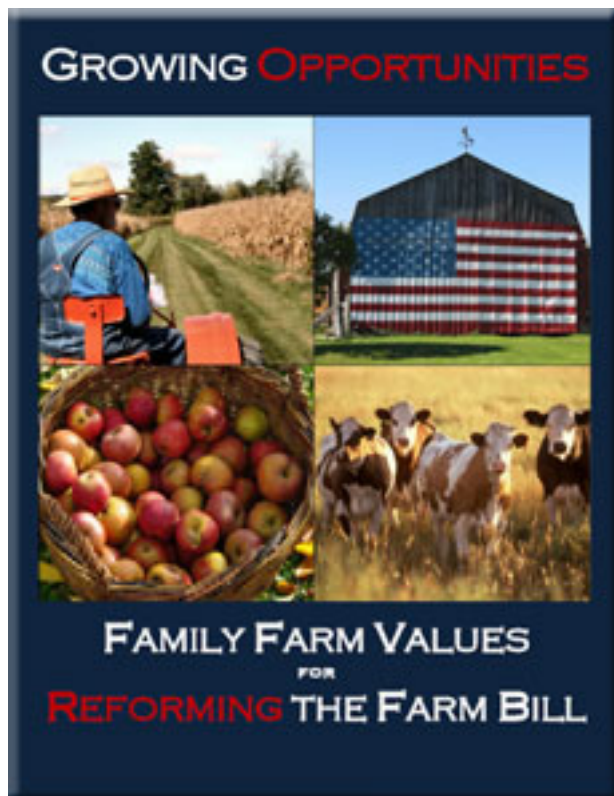
resources. Ninety-nine percent of Oregon's more than 38,000 farms and ranches are family-owned and operated; less than 1% are owned by corporations or other legal entities. These farms and ranches reflect the diversity of Oregon's landscapes, producing more than 220 different crops or products; most of these do not fit the federal definition of "commodity crops."

Agriculture is also one of Oregon's most important exports; agriculture and food products are the state's largest export by volume, and the 2nd largest in terms of value. Leading the list of top exports is cattle and calves, followed by nursery/greenhouse products, then dairy, wheat, hay, grass seed, potatoes, onions, Christmas trees, and grain corn.

Agriculture also plays a key role in Oregon's economy. Farmers and ranchers purchase over

\$3 billion in goods and services, while value-added processing, wholesale trade, and support services add another \$8 billion to Oregon's economy. More than 260,000 jobs from 'farm to fork' are generated by Oregon agriculture.

### Cheated by the System

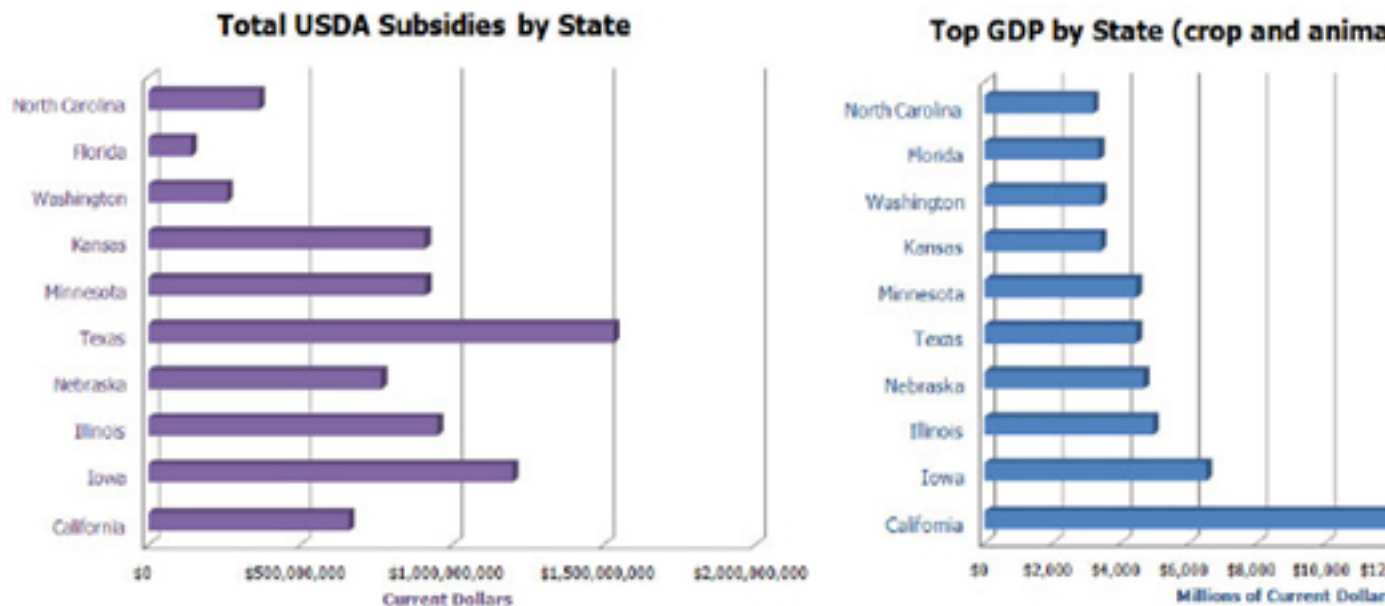


The current Federal Farm Bill supports large agricultural corporations instead of small and midsize farmers, subsidizes manufactured food at the expense of fruits and vegetables, sticks farmers with outrageously high crop insurance costs, and funds food assistance programs that confuse calories with good nutrition.

Simply put, the current Farm Bill is at odds with the values of Americans and the interests of Oregonian farmers.

Congressman Blumenauer's "[Growing Opportunities: Family Farm Values for Reforming the Farm Bill](#)" recommends a number of reforms to improve the Farm Bill for farmers, consumers, and tax payers.

For example, the report recommends the elimination of costly commodity programs. Today, ninety percent of commodity payments go to corporate farms and agribusinesses for five crops -- corn, rice, wheat, soy, and cotton -- that are raised and traded as commodities. In 2010, over \$1.2 billion of all direct commodity crop payments went to a mere 1% of farming entities. Between 1995 and 2010, over \$90 billion, 60% of all payments, went to only 10 states, yet these same states contributed only 10% of the nation's agricultural GDP. It's time we leveled the playing field by investing instead in the thousands of farmers who don't just grow commodity crops.



The current Farm bill also directs an overwhelming amount of crop insurance payments to corporate farms that raise only those five commodity crops. Yet for every \$1 dollar received by these farmers, private crop insurance companies reap \$1.44. The next Farm Bill should ensure that farmers, not insurance agents, are benefitting from taxpayers' \$4.7 billion annual investment in crop insurance. It should also create a new crop insurance program that is available to any farmer, reduces administrative costs, and establishes minimum conservation standards.

Seventy-four percent of the current Farm Bill goes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. When the Food Stamp program was created in the 1960s, the primary concern was a lack of calories; today, it's also a lack of good nutrition. At a time when 34% of American adults over the age of twenty are clinically obese, and one in three children will develop Type II diabetes, it is obvious that we need nutrition program that gives states and local communities the flexibility to meet their residents' nutritional needs while supporting farmers and their local economies.

## **NW Oregon Food Day with Congresswoman Bonamici**



On April 12, Congressman Blumenauer joined Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici for a full day of exploring farm and food issues in NW Oregon. The event started with a tour of Skyline Farm, which produces vegetables for their popular Portland restaurant Meriwether's, followed by a fascinating roundtable discussion of the opportunities and challenges of growing and marketing locally grown food with CSA farmers, winemakers, distributors of organic produce, hazelnut growers, and representatives of Oregon Department of Agriculture and Oregon State University. Blumenauer and Bonamici then headed to Beaverton's Vose Elementary School to learn about Oregon's Farm-to-School program and join students for a delicious and nutritious lunch.

The capstone of the day was the afternoon NW Oregon Food Summit, which attracted more than 160 attendees to hear presentations on Oregon agriculture, value-added processing, direct marketing, efforts to address hunger in Oregon, and the work being done to ensure that Oregonians have access to healthy food. Panelists and attendees alike advocated for a federal Farm Bill that expands critical conservation programs; fully funds research and development programs to combat soil erosion and improved food crops; expanded programs to help address growing food insecurity issues; and increased funding for nutrition and public health programs.

## **The Current Status of Farm Reform**

In the House, Republican leadership of the Agriculture Committee has supported funding cuts for key nutrition programs as a way to reduce government spending. Meanwhile, the Senate Agriculture Committee recently released its draft Farm Bill; mark-up is expected later this week. While the Senate bill eliminates direct payments –a long overdue step – it also makes unwelcome cuts to critical conservation and nutrition programs and establishes an expensive and burdensome new program for commodity crops. Although, it is unlikely that Congress has the appetite to pass any Farm Bill this year, the growing coalition of Americans who support local food and farms and who advocate for programs that help end hunger and promote better nutrition has already left its mark on legislation that seeks to create a better Farm Bill for all Americans.

### **Current Legislation**

[H.R. 2487, the Reducing the Deficit through Eliminating Agricultural Direct Payment Subsidies Act](#) (Rep. Flake): The REAPS Act eliminates the direct payment program and would save taxpayers approximately \$28 billion over ten years.

[H.R. 3286, the Local Food, Farm and Jobs Act](#) (Rep. Pingree): Rep. Pingree's bill provides important funding and support for small and beginning farmers, including research initiatives, technical assistance and infrastructure.

[H.R. 3236, Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act](#) (Rep. Walz and Rep. Fortenberry): The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act makes important adjustments to current programs to increase access to capital, educational opportunities and training. There is companion legislation in the Senate, led by Senator Harkin.

[H.R. 3525, the Healthy Food Financing Act](#) (Rep. Burgess, Schwartz and Blumenauer): Healthy Food Financing Act. The legislation established a Health Food Financing Initiative, to support local businesses and increase access to healthy food in food deserts.

### **□ Pending Legislation**

*American Family Farm and Ranchland Conservation Act:* Rep. Blumenauer and Rep. Cantor introduced the American Family Farm and Ranchland Conservation Act in the 111<sup>th</sup>

Congress. The legislation provides an estate tax exemption for up to \$5 million for farmers who have placed their land under conservation easement. The legislation will be reintroduced in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress.

*Conservation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:* Rep. Blumenauer is pursuing legislation to streamline our conservation program, increase its effectiveness and expand it to adequately meet the needs of farmers and ranchers. The legislation will be introduced in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress.

[<Previous Idea](#)  
[Next Idea>](#)

